

Tim and the Hidden People

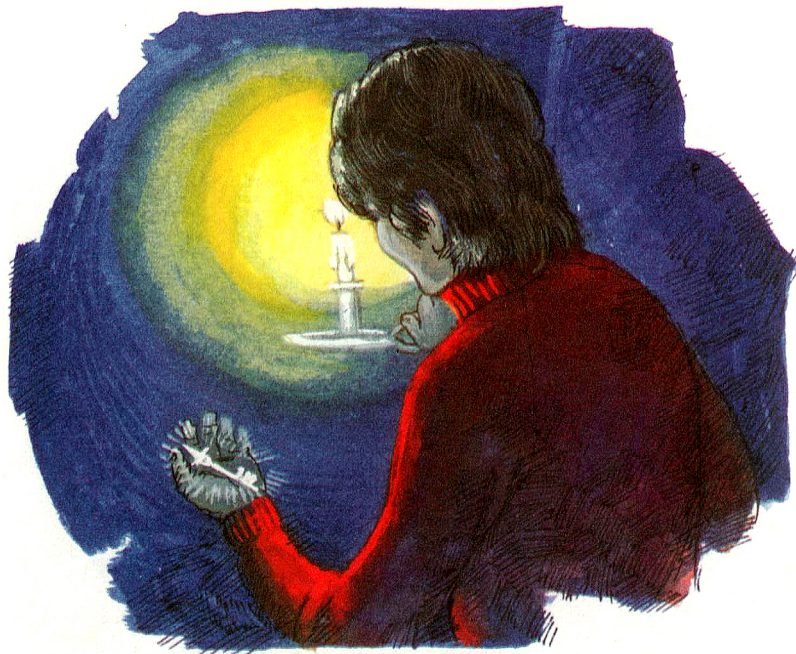
Tim and Tobias

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



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Tim felt restless, as he sat by the fire after tea. Aunt May had gone out, and he was alone in the kitchen. The kitchen window shook in the wind.



The window shook again. Tim looked up quickly. There was no one there, but Tim had the feeling that someone was outside.

He got up, and went to the window.

It was cold and grey out there in The Yard, but there was nobody about. He couldn't see very much from the kitchen window, so he climbed upstairs to his bedroom.



Tim's room was an attic, at the very top of the house. His father and mother were dead, and he lived with his Aunt May, in a tall house in The Yard. Aunt May lived in a room in the basement, next door to the kitchen. All the rooms in between were let to lodgers.

Tim went across to the window, and looked down into The Yard. It was beginning to get dark.

There were eleven houses in The Yard. There was one house at each corner and there were two houses in between the corners on three sides of The Yard. On the last side there was only one house, and a gap which led to the street.

A canal ran along the other side of the street. The Yard had once been a boat yard, where they built canal boats, but no one had built any boats there for a hundred years or more. They had built houses instead. That was a long time ago, too, and now the houses themselves were old. But the oldest thing in The Yard was a big tree, which stood in the middle. There were broken railings around it and it looked as if it were half dead, but it still had a few green leaves in the spring.

As Tim watched, the street lamp came on outside.

The Yard looked empty, and yet Tim had the feeling that someone was looking out of the shadows.





Tim went back to the door to turn on the light. He clicked the switch down.

Nothing happened.

“The bulb’s gone again,” he said to himself, and ran downstairs to get some candles and matches. Aunt May always said she would get a spare bulb, but she never did.

He heard Miss Miff’s door shut, as he went back up the stairs. Miss Miff was the lodger on the ground floor. She didn’t like boys, and Tim was glad he had missed her.



He got back to his room, and lit two candles. He set one down by the door, and the other on the little table by his bed.

The candle light looked yellow and warm.



Tim went back to the window.

Dark clouds were blowing across the sky.
The branches of the old tree tossed in the wind.

The Yard was empty, but Tim still had the
feeling that someone was out there.



The town clock struck six. Aunt May wouldn't be back for a long time yet.

Tim picked up the candle by the door, and went across the little landing to the back attic to look for a book.



There was no light in the back attic, because no one lived there. It was full of trunks and old, broken furniture, which nobody could use, but which Aunt May didn't want to throw away.

Tim often went into the old attic to poke about. The trunks were locked, but there was a pile of old books in one corner. The books were covered in dust, but Tim liked to look at them. Some of them had pictures of strange places, and animals, and men who lived long ago.



Tim set the candle down on a trunk, and picked up a book from the floor.

It fell open at the picture of a cat. It was the picture of a very thin, black cat, with bright green eyes and a long, thin tail. The cat was standing on some kind of rock, but that was all you could see: the cat took up most of the picture.

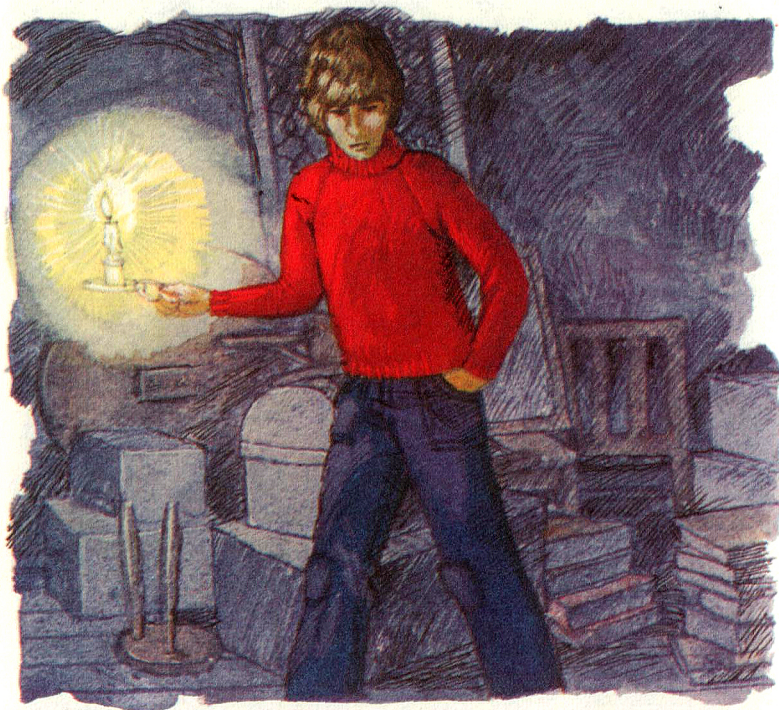
Under the picture was the one word: Tobias.



Tim looked at the picture for a long time, but at last he shut the book, and put it down on a trunk.

He was just bending down to pick up another, when he saw the key. The key was lying on the floor at his feet, shining like silver. It was so dark in the room, that Tim would never have seen the key, if it had not been shining itself. He bent down and picked it up.

It was a very strange key. Tim had never seen anything like it before. It was made of silver, and it was a very strange shape.



The first time he looked at it, the end of the key looked something like a cat. But as he looked, it seemed to change, and now it looked like a very old man. Tim picked up the candle. As the candlelight shone on the key, the end of it looked like a witch's hat, with a witch's face under it. But then it changed again, and looked just like any other key.

Tim put the key in his pocket, and went back to his own room.



He opened the door of his bedroom and stood still, staring.

Tobias was sitting on his bed looking at him. His long, thin tail was curled around him. His big, pointed ears made his face seem smaller. He had long, white whiskers, and he looked at Tim with bright eyes which shone like green fire.



Tim stood still and stared.

“Who – Are you Tobias?” he asked.

“Of course I am,” said Tobias. “You found the key, Tim, so now you can see the Hidden People. There are Hidden People everywhere, only you can’t see them – unless you have the key. Put out the candles. There’s a broomstick at the window.”

Tobias jumped down from the bed and ran to the window. Tim had left the window shut, but it was open now.

Tobias jumped up on to the sill, and stepped out of the window.



Tim blew out the candles, and went slowly over to the window. He looked out. The street light was out, and it was very dark in The Yard below.

A broomstick was floating in the air outside, just like a boat on the water. It was tied to the window by a bit of string.

“Where are you going?” asked Tim.

“Climb on to the window-sill,” said Tobias.
“Come on, Tim. We’re going for a ride.”

He jumped off the sill on to one end of the broomstick. The broomstick bobbed down and then up again, like a boat.

“But –”, began Tim.

The wind had dropped. The night was still and it was very dark outside.

“Climb on to the window-sill,” said Tobias again.

“We won’t go far tonight – just out for a ride.”

Tim climbed on to the sill, and looked down. It was a long way to the dark ground below.

“Come *on* Tim,” said Tobias. “Don’t be so slow! We haven’t got all night.”

“How do I get on to the broomstick?” asked Tim.

“Sit on it,” said Tobias. “Keep both your legs on one side, and hold on. It’s easy.”

Tim held on to the window-sill with one hand until he had a good grip on the broomstick with the other. He slid his legs across and let go of the sill. The broomstick bobbed down under him, but it came up quickly.

Tobias twitched his tail.

The string dropped to the ground below.

Tim felt the broomstick begin to move.





He shut his eyes.

When he opened his eyes again, Tobias was sitting in front of him, and they were sailing over the roofs of the houses and out of the yard.

Tim saw the canal below him, and the wet road, shining in the light of the street lamps. It wasn't very late, but the street was empty.

The broomstick began to drop lower.



“What’s that boat on the canal?” asked Tim.

He could see a long boat below, and there were two men by it. The boat was tied up at the side of the canal, by a pile of boxes.

The men looked strange. It was very dark, and yet Tim could see them. They had stocking caps on their heads, and dark jerseys.



Tobias looked down.

"I didn't know they were running a cargo tonight," he said.

"Who are they?" asked Tim.

Tobias turned his head to look at him, and Tim saw that his eyes were shining very brightly.

"They are two of the Hidden People" he said. "You'll find out in time. But we'll go back now. They haven't met you yet, and they won't want you around when they're running a cargo, not until they know you."

"I'd like to go on, now we've started," said Tim.

Tobias shook his head.

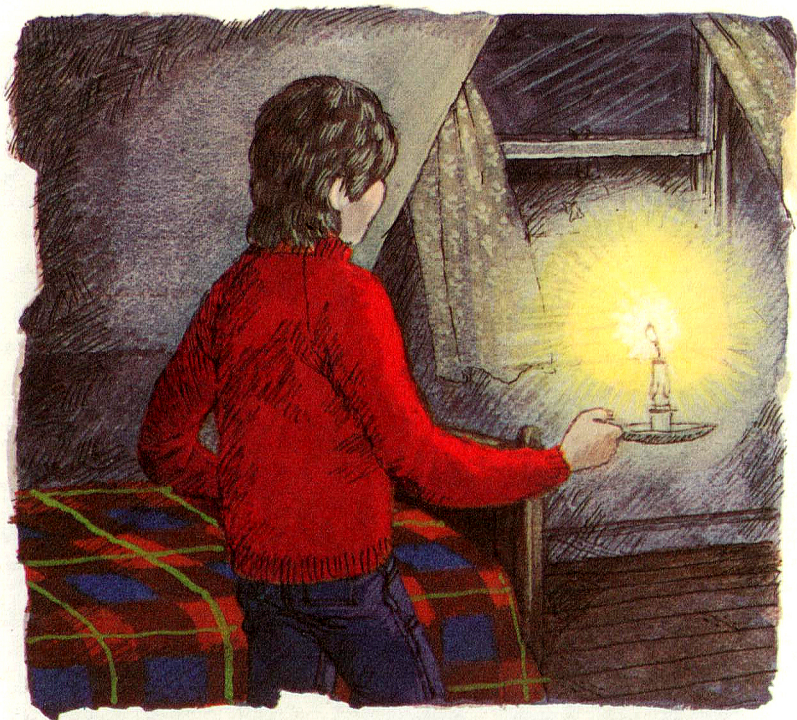
"Not tonight," he said.

The broomstick swung round, and headed back to The Yard.



Tim saw a light in Miss Miff's window, as they sailed over a roof top.

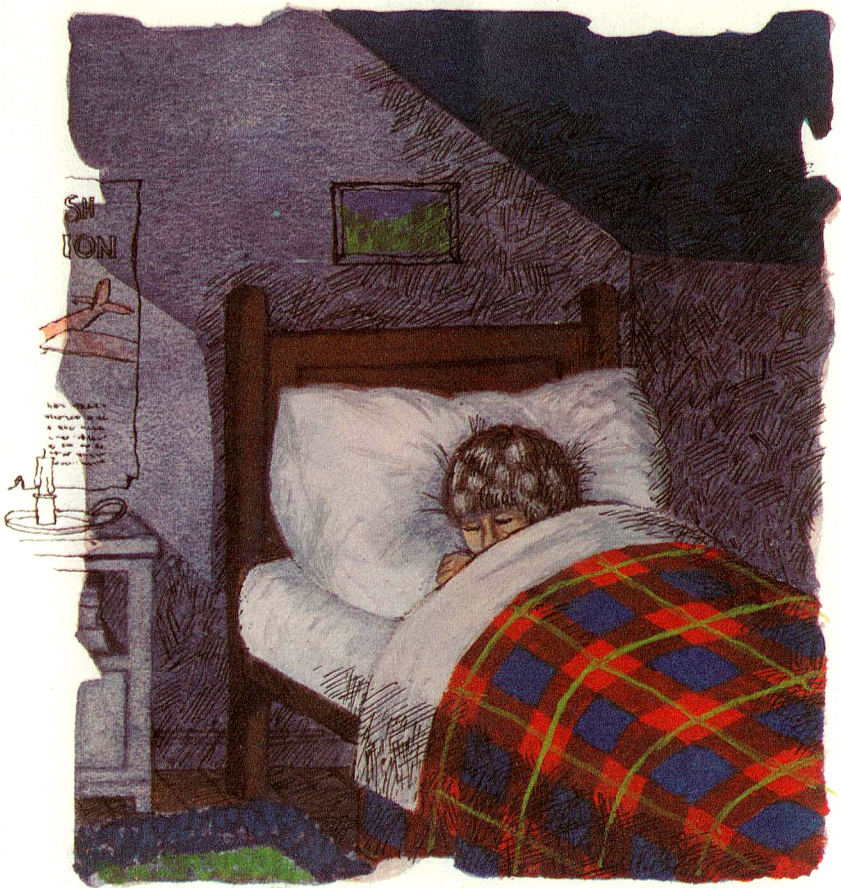
He could see the firelight in the kitchen. The rest of the house was dark.



The broomstick stopped at the window.
Tim climbed across the sill, and into the room.
“Light the candles,” said Tobias.

Tim felt for the matches. He lit the candle
by the bed, and turned back to the window.
There was no one there.

He ran across to the window and looked out.
It was light in the yard below: the street lamp
had come on. But The Yard was empty. Tobias
and the broomstick had gone.



The town clock struck nine. Tim suddenly felt very tired. He shut down the window, pulled off his clothes, and climbed into bed.

He blew out the candle, and fell asleep as soon as he shut his eyes.



Tim woke up the next morning to hear Aunt May shouting up the stairs, telling him to get up.

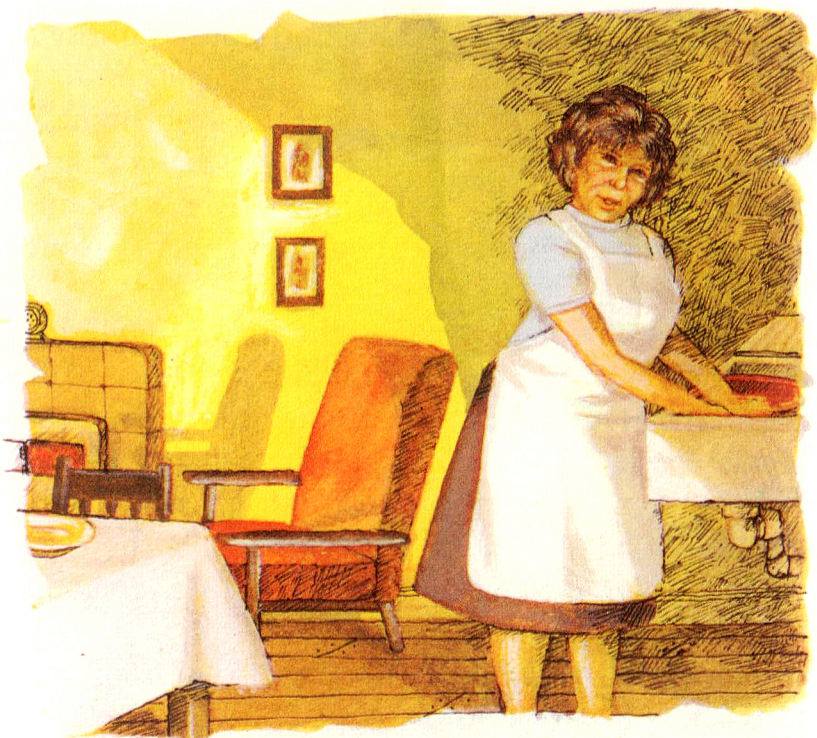
He sat up, and looked around.

The room looked just as it always did.

“It must have been a dream,” Tim said to himself.

He splashed his face in a basin on the table by the door, (the lodgers were always in the bathroom in the morning) and pulled on his clothes.

He opened the door, and went downstairs.



The sun was shining in at the kitchen window, and a bright fire was burning in the stove. Breakfast was on the table, and Aunt May was at the sink.

“Well, you *did* have a sleep,” said Aunt May, as Tim went in. “You were fast asleep when I got in last night, and I’ve been calling and calling to get you up this morning.”

Tim sat down at the table and poured himself a cup of tea.

"It must have been a dream last night," he said to himself, as Aunt May went outside to bring in the milk. "It *must* have been a dream. I saw the picture in that book, and then I went to bed."

Everything looked so bright in the daylight.

He heard Aunt May talking to Miss Miff upstairs. He heard the thud, thud, thud of footsteps on the stairs, as the other lodger, Mr. Bunce, came down to the front hall. (Mr. Bunce lived on the second floor, and he was a very big, fat man. The stairs always shook as he came down.)

Tim heard the bang of the front door, as Mr. Bunce went outside.

There was a crash on the front steps, and a shout from Mr. Bunce.

Tim ran to the window. Mr. Bunce was sitting on the pavement. He saw Tim at the window, shook his fist at him, and got slowly to his feet. He turned to go back into the house, but then he stopped, looked at his watch, and went off.

"Tim!" shouted Aunt May. "Tim! Come up here!"

Tim ran upstairs.





Aunt May was standing by the open front door with a broomstick in her hand.

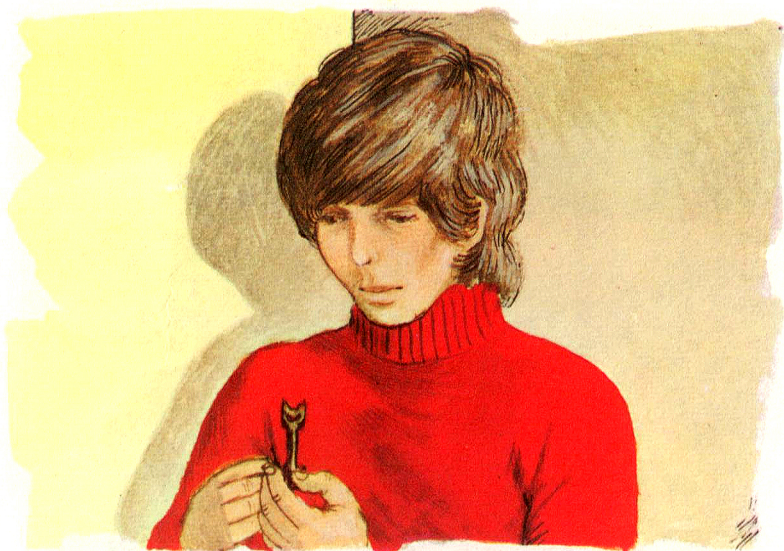
“Have you been playing with this?” she asked.

Tim said nothing. He just stood and looked at the broomstick.

“How many times have I told you to put things away?” said Aunt May. “Go and put this in the shed in the back yard. You might have known someone would fall over it. Mr. Bunce might have broken his neck.”



Tim took the broomstick without a word. He went along the passage to the back door, and out into the little back yard. The door of the shed was open. Tim put the broomstick inside, shut the door, and went back into the house.



He was just going downstairs to the kitchen again, when he stopped, and pushed his hand down deep into his pocket. His fingers felt something hard. Tim pulled it out.

It was the key.

The key wasn't shining now. It was dull black. But it still looked a very strange key. The end looked a bit like a cat's face, with pointed ears, and holes where the eyes should be.

Tim pushed the key back into his pocket, and ran down the stairs to the kitchen.

FLIGHTPATH TO READING

A Series

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key



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